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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SOFIA 000690

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BULGARIA RESPONDS POSITIVELY ON GUANTANAMO

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Susan Sutton for reasons 1.4 (b)/(d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Tsvetan Tsvetanov told Special Envoy Dan Fried on December 3, 2009 that the Government of Bulgaria would likely accept one or two Guantanamo detainees, though he did not make an absolute commitment. Fried passed the files of nine detainees for Bulgaria's consideration and extended an invitation for Bulgarian experts to travel to Guantanamo to interview the detainees. Tsvetanov said he would review the files and return a formal response. He noted that he did not anticipate any resistance from within the ruling party, but he was concerned about political attacks from outside. In an effort to prevent this, he asked Fried to engage with the Presidency and the leaders of three key political parties to explain U.S. policy on Guantanamo and to clearly state what we are asking of our European partners. In subsequent separate meetings with Fried, President Parvanov's Chief of Staff Nikola Kolev pledged to help the government move forward to a positive conclusion, and the leadership of the allied coalition parties and opposition socialist party expressed support for the Obama administration's policies on Guantanamo and noted an inclination to assist the United States while not firmly extending support to the resettlement of detainees in Bulgaria. Only the ethnically-Turkish party, Movement for Rights and Freedom, categorically promised to support the government on a decision to resettle detainees. END SUMMARY.

GOVERNMENT WILLING TO MOVE FORWARD

12. (C) Tsvetanov predicted Bulgaria would be able to accept one detainee; two detainees is possible, he said, but "optimistic." He suggested that in meetings with other party officials, Fried propose "one to three" detainees, noting that in his meetings with them most focused on it being only one detainee.

13. (C) Tsvetanov said he is in contact with the leaders of the other significant political parties and believes his government can move forward in discussions about Guantanamo without risking political attack. He has received assurances from the Socialist Party, the ethnically-Turkish party, the center-right Blue Coalition and the ultra-nationalist Ataka party that the Guantanamo issue would not be used to score political points. He remained concerned, however, about the Law, Order and Justice Party, because its leader Yane Yanev is highly "unpredictable." Tsvetanov also expressed concern about the position of President Parvanov, since he and the Prime Minister have recently sparred publicly over the record of the previous government. Tsvetanov greatly appreciated Fried's visit and emphasized that his face-to-face meetings with other parties would reduce the risk of politicization of the issue.

14. (C) Tsvetanov said his government was naturally inclined to help the United States on this issue, and hoped that in the future, the United States could continue to assist Bulgaria in areas of specific concern, noting specifically Visa Waiver and deepened law enforcement cooperation. He

also asked for U.S. financial assistance to defray some of the resettlement costs, which Fried said is a possibility although it would only be a symbolic amount in the neighborhood of \$50,000-\$80,000 per detainee.

OTHER PARTIES INCLINED TO SUPPORT

15. (C) The President's Chief of Staff, Nikola Kolev, said that prospects for Bulgaria accepting a detainee are "positive." He noted that the final decision rests with the government, but he said the President and Prime Minister would consult on the issue and that he would help "push this through." Ex-Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev, the leader of the Socialist Party, said he was inclined to support Bulgaria's acceptance of a detainee or two, but said he could not speak for his entire party. Whether his party decides to formally support or not, he pledged that the issue would not be used to attack the government. Likewise, the Co-Chairs of the center-right Blue Coalition expressed support for the closure of Guantanamo and said that as a partner it was natural for Bulgaria to assist the U.S. in this effort, but they could not unconditionally endorse accepting detainees until they had more information from the government on the specific detainees and the plans for resettlement. Co-chair Ivan Kostov (DSB) stated that the way forward not include formal parliamentary consultation on the issue and that the government, per its exclusive mandate, move forward with the decision based on its review of the pertinent information. Younal Loutfi, the Deputy Chairman of the ethnically-Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedom, immediately gave his party's full support for resettlement of detainees.

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16. (C) COMMENT: The Embassy will re-engage with Tsvetanov once he has had a chance to review the files of the nine detainees. Prospects for Bulgaria accepting at least one detainee look good, though the government must perform a delicate balancing act to keep all other parties in check. A nasty spat on an unrelated issue between any of the personalities at the top could still derail progress. A public leak of the government's plans could also have unpredictable consequences. Continued contact from Washington will provide the government with political cover and help maintain the forward momentum.
SUTTON